



Directorate of
Intelligence

CTASOV...

USSR Review

May 1991

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
6/01 b1 b3

May 1991

Copy 331

FA
CS
H

Soviet-Iranian Relations Reach New Stage

Deputy Foreign Minister Belonogov's latest visit to Tehran in early March underscores Soviet attempts to work with Iran to shape a regional security system and to build its political influence in the region through bilateral relations and the UN. Belonogov was probably dispatched to probe Iranian views on postwar

security structures and to lobby Iran to support a UN-controlled regional security organization. Both sides emphasized the need to quickly establish a security structure based primarily on the interests of the region and noted the need for the UN to help create it, according to TASS. [REDACTED]

Belonogov and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Va'ezzi also discussed Afghanistan and agreed to exchange delegations to examine the issue in the near future. By the end of March, Soviet Ambassador at Large Kozyrev arrived in Tehran for his first round of talks; he emphasized that Moscow considered Iran key to any final political solution in Afghanistan, according to press reports. [REDACTED]

A Soviet radio commentary on 5 April noted that Iranian agreement to receive the Foreign Minister of Switzerland—who looks after US interests in Iran—signaled the beginning of the normalization of US-Iranian relations and would improve conditions in the Gulf region. The commentary also suggested, however, that Tehran would not accept an enhanced US military presence in the Gulf in exchange for improved relations. [REDACTED]

Moscow apparently believes—as apparently does Tehran—that the Gulf war has given Iran and the Soviet Union a common interest in limiting US influence in the Gulf. The two countries also have found common ground in their desire to prevent the dismemberment of Iraq, as *Pravda* noted during Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati's meeting with Gorbachev in mid-February. In his mid-February speech before the Supreme Soviet, Foreign Minister Bessmertnykh applauded Khomeini's assertion that the Gulf war was not a fight between Muslims and non-Muslims and appeared to view this as evidence that Tehran was moderating its fundamentalist position. [REDACTED]

Soviet-Iranian cooperation reached new levels during the Gulf crisis, continuing a trend that began in 1989. Moscow drew upon Tehran's goodwill to allow over 200 Soviet specialists and Embassy employees to leave Iraq by traveling overland through Iran. The Soviet leadership quickly dispatched Belonogov to Tehran in early February to consult with Iranian leaders on Iran's peace initiative and to reiterate Moscow's desire to play an active role in mediating a settlement. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Soviet civilian exports to Iran increased threefold to over \$600 million in 1990. [REDACTED]

Moscow will move aggressively to further strengthen its ties to Iran this year by stressing mutual interest in keeping foreign military forces out of the Gulf and Moscow's desire for more trade with Iran. The Soviets will continue to promote Iranian participation in any postwar multilateral security system to try to reduce US influence in the Middle East. Moscow will continue to offer to sell large amounts of advanced weaponry to Iran—including T-72 tanks—to gain hard currency and favor with Tehran. Despite Moscow's support for arms control in the region, Soviet officials will most likely argue that these arms are defensive and that any limits on them should be part of a multilateral agreement including all sellers, not just the USSR. Moscow also probably hopes that better relations will restrain Tehran from fomenting unrest in the USSR's Muslim-dominated southern republics. [REDACTED]

The Soviets will continue to enlist active Iranian participation in a political settlement of Afghanistan. Moscow probably hopes to underscore the need for a regional solution to the Afghanistan problem and further limit US leverage. Moreover, the Soviets believe Tehran may be able to help gain the release of Soviet POW's in Afghanistan. [REDACTED]

Nonetheless, Moscow will also have to be wary that improving relations with Tehran too quickly will undermine other Soviet efforts in the region. The Soviets undoubtedly understand that the Gulf Arab states will fear significant Soviet rearmament of Iran. Moscow probably hopes that Iran's neutrality during the Gulf crisis will lessen the Gulf countries' fears of Iranian hegemony and allow the Soviets to pursue good relations with all sides. To reassure the Arab states and to help maintain the balance of power in the region, the Soviets will stress Iraq's territorial integrity. [REDACTED]

